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ABSTRACT

A total of 21 full-day structured classroom observations were conducted in six classes of the Austin Independent School District Bilingual Preschool Project (Texas) having a high incidence of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. Each class consisted of 15 LEP students and 3 English-proficient students. It was anticipated that English-proficient students would act as models for their LEP classmates. Two observers fluent in English and Spanish and trained in classroom observation techniques used the Early Childhood Observation Form (Revised) to record events and behaviors of specific children according to preestablished codes and definitions. Minute-by-minute records were made of the experiences of individual children across the school day. Three types of children were observed: (1) Spanish-dominant; (2) English-dominant, high proficiency; and (3) speakers of English and Spanish with low language skills. Findings indicated that over half the school day was devoted to noninstructional activities; bilingually certified teachers and their aides provided instruction; structured learning activities were conducted predominately in English, with some Spanish being used with Spanish-dominant children; teachers differed in the amount of time spent in providing structured instruction; small-group instruction was the predominant mode of instruction; and interaction between English-proficient children and LEP peers occurred during unstructured instruction. The Early Childhood Observation Form and a summary of its use in this study are appended. (RH)

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# A PEEK AT A BILINGUAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN

## (AERA Session # 3.23)

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Austin Independent School District

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# A PEEK AT A BILINGUAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN

## Introduction

Are pre-kindergarten programs just another name for baby-sitting? Are they organized or just fun and games? How is the day carved up?

In Austin we have sought the answers to these questions by conducting observations of specific randomly chosen children in the classroom setting.

Research (Walberg, 1978; Bell and Davidson, 1976) tells us that children who have more engagement (interaction) time with the content of instruction tend to learn more. While that finding is not particularly startling, **a substantial part of each instructional day is lost to activities that do not contribute to the child's learning;** transition time between activities, waiting a turn to respond, non-attending behavior, naps, discipline problems, disorganized activities, etc. Many of these activities may be essential but the amount of time devoted to them may be much more than is necessary. Through observations, we can at least tell how time is being spent and judge, as best we can, how we might improve.

## Educational Importance

Austin's Bilingual Pre-kindergarten (Title VII) was established to serve Hispanic children who are limited English proficient (LEP). If these children are to be successful in the regular classrooms a great deal of language learning must take place.

Classroom observations provide one basis for monitoring the classroom and determining how much instruction is taking place. Efficient use of time may make the difference between success and failure in the child's subsequent education. It is here where a solid foundation must be built. If the child's pre- kindergarten and kindergarten are diligent in promoting the child's language and knowledge base, these children may progress normally in the regular education program.

## Procedure

Twenty-one structured classroom observations were conducted in the six classes of the AISD Bilingual Preschool Project. These classes were located at six neighborhood schools with a high incidence of limited English proficient (LEP) students. Each class consisted of:

- o 15 limited English proficient students, and
- o 3 model students.

The 15 LEP students were selected at random from a pool of applicants who were classified as LEP following AISD's classification procedures which are based on state requirements. The other three students were selected on the basis of high scores on the English version of Primary Acquisition of Language (PAL) test. It

was anticipated that these students would act as language models for the other classmates.

Classroom observations were conducted during the month of March and the first two weeks of April in the six Title VII preschool classes. Visits were not announced but teachers knew what date observations started and how many times they were going to be observed. Certain conditions were followed in scheduling observations. The same school was not visited twice during the same week and observation sessions for each school were scheduled on different days of the week. There were a total of 26 class visits for the purpose of conducting observations.

Observations lasted the entire school day (390 minutes, from 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.).

Two observers were hired to conduct classroom observations. Both were fluent in English and Spanish. They were trained in classroom observation techniques and were taught the definition of the variables to be observed. Observers used the Early Childhood Observation Form (Revised). It is a form where events and behaviors of a specific child are observed and recorded according to preestablished codes and definitions. The form was developed by ORE's staff. It was slightly modified to include some variables of special interest to the Title VII Bilingual Preschool Project.

The first four observations were used as a training exercise for the observers and to establish interrater reliability. During these four observations the observers and the evaluator recorded pupil activities on the Early Childhood Observation form. After each of these sessions, recorded responses were compared and discussed for the purpose of establishing interrater reliability.

There were five observations from the total 26 conducted that were discarded from analyses for several reasons. One of the classes observed lasted only half-day due to a teacher staff development session scheduled for the time remaining of the school day. Since this was not considered to be a typical day it was discarded. Another four were eliminated because, for a variety of reasons, observers left minutes of the observation unrecorded.

The unit of observation was a school-day minute. The observations focused on the experience of a particular student during a school day. He/she was followed throughout the school day and minute by minute records were taken of his/her personal experience during a particular school day.

The observers followed a preestablished selection procedure to pick the child to be observed. Each observer was provided with a roster of students according to language ability. Before class started, each teacher was asked to identify four children, specified by the observer, among whom the target child was included. To avoid the possibility of a bias if the teacher knew which child was being observed, they were not told which student was under observation.

Observations were obtained on three types of children:

Group A consisted of children who were Spanish-dominant. Group C was its counterpart, children who were English-dominant and had a relatively high degree of English proficiency. In this group were classified all the Non-LEP students and children that were LEP but whose English proficiency was higher than others in the class. The third group, labeled B, contained children with low language skills in both English and Spanish.

## Results/Conclusions

Twenty-one full day observations in March and April of 1982 provided information to answer the following questions:

- o How much time was dedicated to instructional and non-instructional activities?
- o Who provided instruction?
- o To what extent was dual language instruction provided?
- o What proportion of structured instruction was provided in small (medium or large) groups?
- o How was communication between English proficient and limited English proficient (LEP) students facilitated?

### How much time was dedicated to instructional and non-instructional activities?

Figure 1 illustrates the basic findings of the 1982 Title VII pre-kindergarten observations. Over half of the school day (51.4%) was used on non-instructional activities. While this amount may be unnecessarily high, it is less than the non-instructional part of the day (61%) reported by Carsrud (1982) for Title I kindergarten students.

The problem of defining instruction and non-instruction for pre-kindergartners is a formidable task since they may learn from virtually any situation. For the purposes of this study, non-instructional activities (200 min/day) include the following uses of time:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| - nap | 29.0% | 58 minutes |
| - transitions | 22.0% | 44 minutes |
| - freetime | 16.5% | 33 minutes |
| - lunch | 16.5% | 33 minutes |
| - breakfast | 9.0% | 18 minutes |
| - snack | 3.5% | 7 minutes |
| - restroom visits | 3.5% | 7 minutes |

Figure 2 indicates the various categories and proportions of the non- instructional time.

Instructional time is subdivided into structured and unstructured instruction. Structured instruction refers to those activities that are planned, have specific rules or expectations concerning student behavior and are directed in some way by an adult. Unstructured instruction refers to activities engaged in by the student without direct adult guidance or other activities such as music, physical education, sharing experiences, attending special programs, listening to stories, and working in the classroom's learning centers.

Figure 1 indicates that only about 20% of the school day is used for structured instruction. Could more time in this area result in more tangible educational payoffs? It is anticipated that subsequent instruction and evaluation designs will address this question.

### Who provided instruction?

Instruction was provided primarily by bilingually certified teachers and their aides. Occasionally others were responsible for instruction such as a music teacher, physical education coaches, librarians and substitute teachers.

The pattern varied somewhat at one school in that the Title VII and Title I Migrant teachers taught their respective classes as a team. Both of these pre-kindergarten classes were held in an open area separated only by bookcases and short partitions. Joint activities were common.

Figure 3 and 4 indicate the average amount of time provided by each type of instructor during structured and unstructured instruction.

**To what extent was dual language instruction provided?**

The predominant language of structured instruction was English. However, a substantial amount of Spanish was used in the instruction of Spanish-dominant children (see Figure 5). Typically, structured instruction was provided in small group sessions. The groups were composed of Spanish-dominant, English- dominant, or low English-low Spanish children. The teacher would take one group, the aide another, and the third group was assigned to independent study at one of the learning centers. After about 15 minutes the groups would rotate and then rotate again until all had received instruction in all three settings.

**What proportion of structured instruction was provided in small groups?**

Table I illustrates the average number of minutes of structured instruction according to group size and language group. Although the use of structured instruction was highly encouraged by the teachers' supervisors, the large variance associated with each of the language groups suggests there is little commonality among teachers in the amount of time spent in structured instruction. This difference is so strong that it obscures most of the differences that may exist among the language groups. The low incidence of large group structured instruction and the small number of children who were observed make the findings associated with large group instruction questionable.

It is apparent, however, that small group instruction is the predominant mode of instruction for all three language groups.

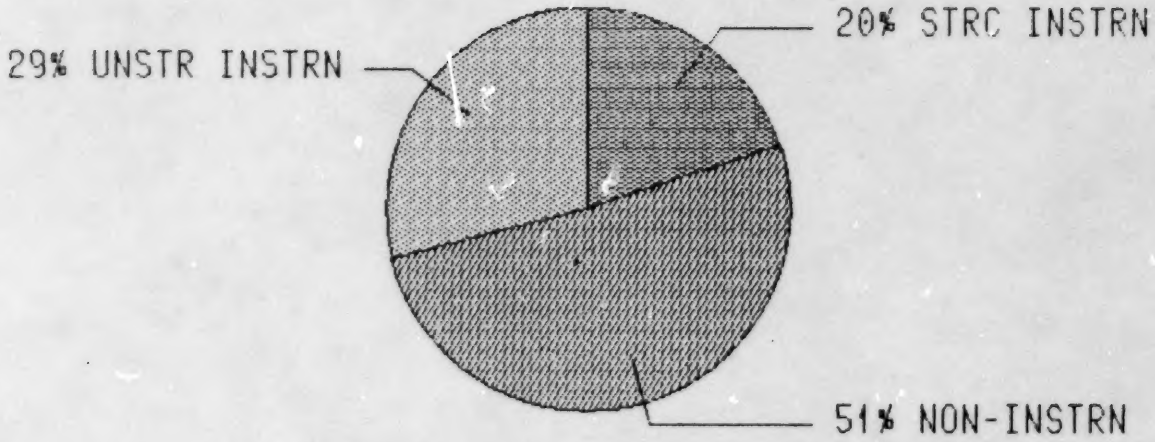
**How was communication between English proficient and limited English proficient students facilitated?**

Each class contained three English proficient students. It was anticipated that these children would serve as English speaking role models for their limited English proficient (LEP) peers. Some of the English proficient children were also fluent Spanish speakers. These were grouped with the Spanish-dominant children for structured instructional activities. The major interaction between the English proficient children occurred during unstructured instruction when all students were combined for instructional purposes. Classes were not organized to formally utilize the English skills of the English proficient students; rather, they were present to act as informal role models with respect to English language usage.

TABLE I: AVERAGE MINUTES OF STRUCTURED INSTRUCTION
BY LANGUAGE GROUP AND GROUP SIZE

| | | GROUP SIZE | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1-6 | 7-12 | 13-18 | Total |
| Group A | $\bar{X}$ | 52.62 min | 14.87 | 16.37 | 83.87 |
| | S | 44.00 min | 18.97 | 27.73 | 36.24 |
| | % | 62.74 | 17.73 | 19.52 | 100 |
| | N | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| GROUP B | $\bar{X}$ | 49.5 | 20.25 | 5.00 | 74.75 |
| | S | 25.17 | 23.02 | 4.86 | 27.31 |
| | % | 66.22 | 27.09 | 6.68 | 100 |
| | N | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| GROUP C | $\bar{X}$ | 52.80 | 16.40 | 0 | 69.20 |
| | S | 29.72 | 28.02 | | 25.62 |
| | % | 76.30 | 23.69 | 0 | 100 |
| | N | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| TOTAL | $\bar{X}$ | 51.47 | 17.28 | 8.14 | 76.90 |
| | S | 32.84 | 21.78 | 18.03 | 29.80 |
| | % | 66.93 | 22.47 | 10.58 | 100 |
| | N | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 |

GROUP A: Spanish-dominant
B: Low-level language (English and Spanish)
C: English-dominant




Unstructured, Structured, Non-, Instruction

Figure 1. Title VII Pre-Kindergarten School Day 1982

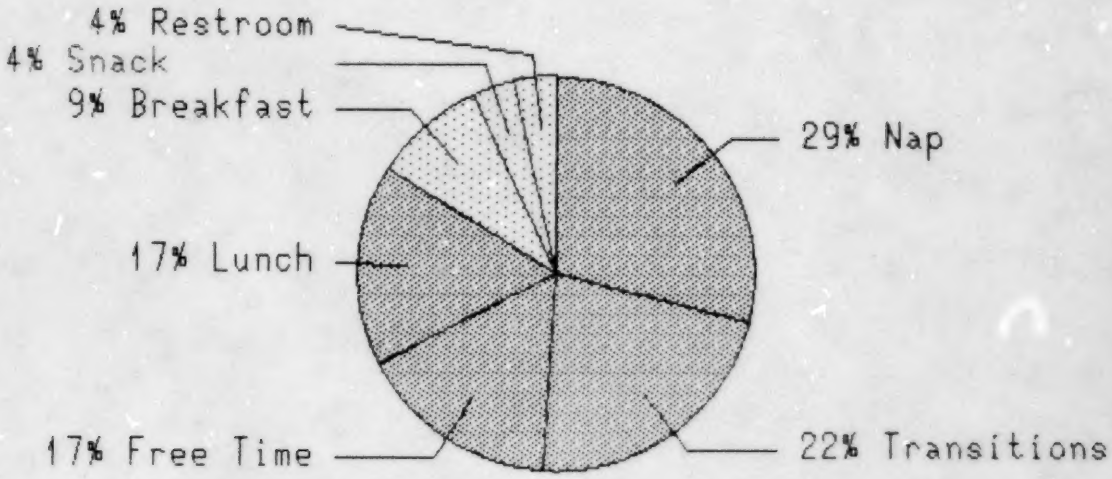



Figure 2. Non-Instructional Activities (200 min/day)

Bilingual Pre-Kindergarten Observations

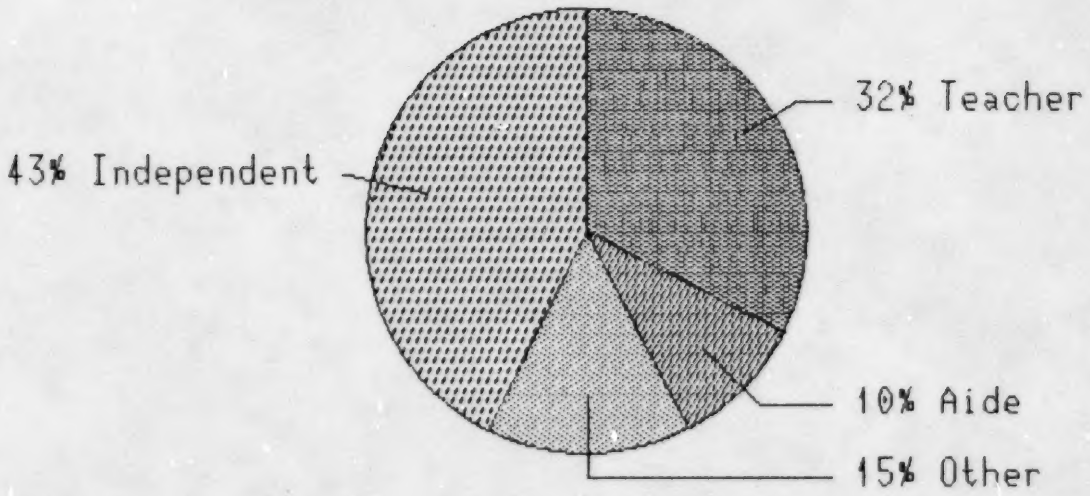



Figure 4. Student's Unstructured-Instruction Providers

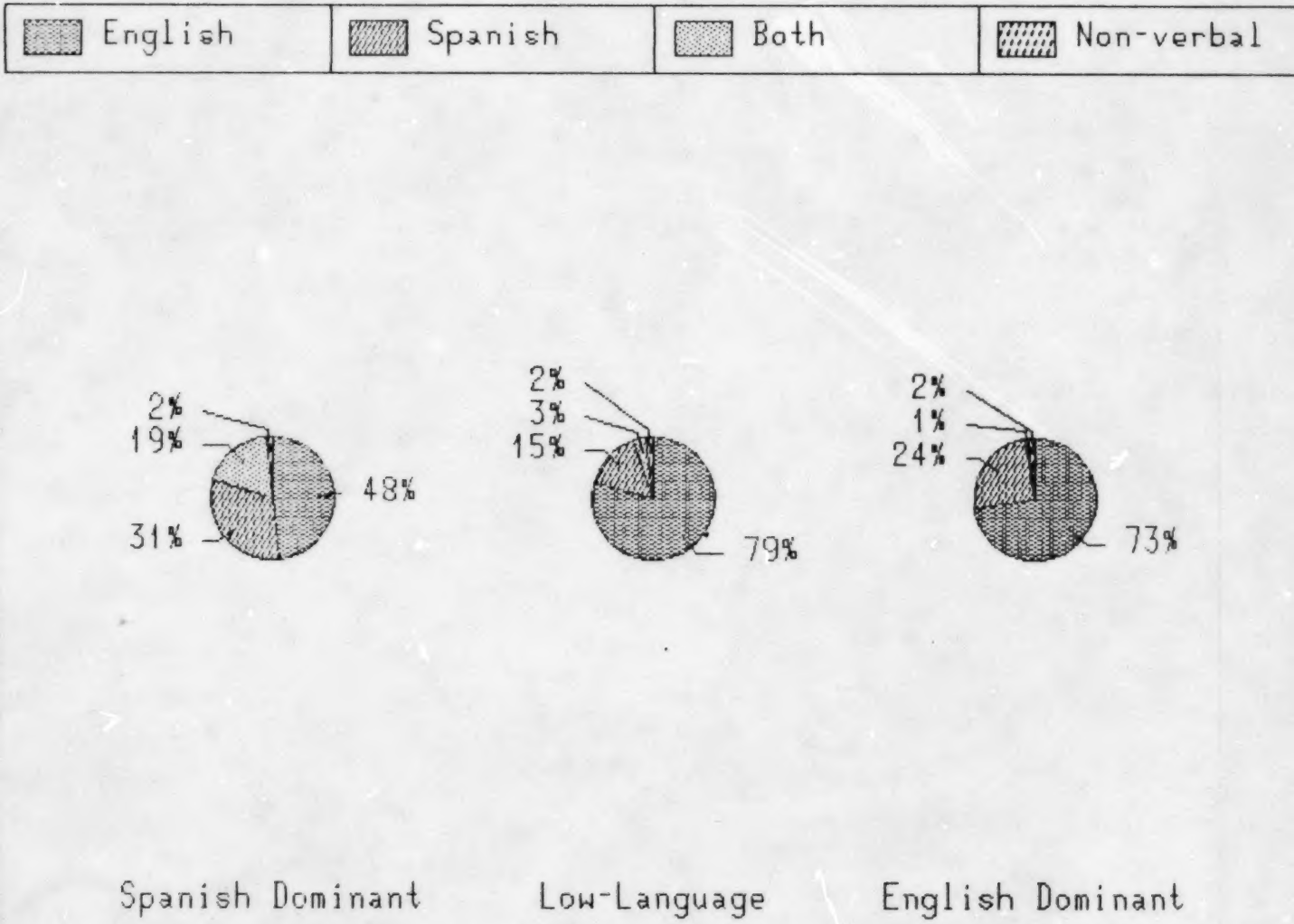



Figure 5. Language of Instruction by Language Dominance Group

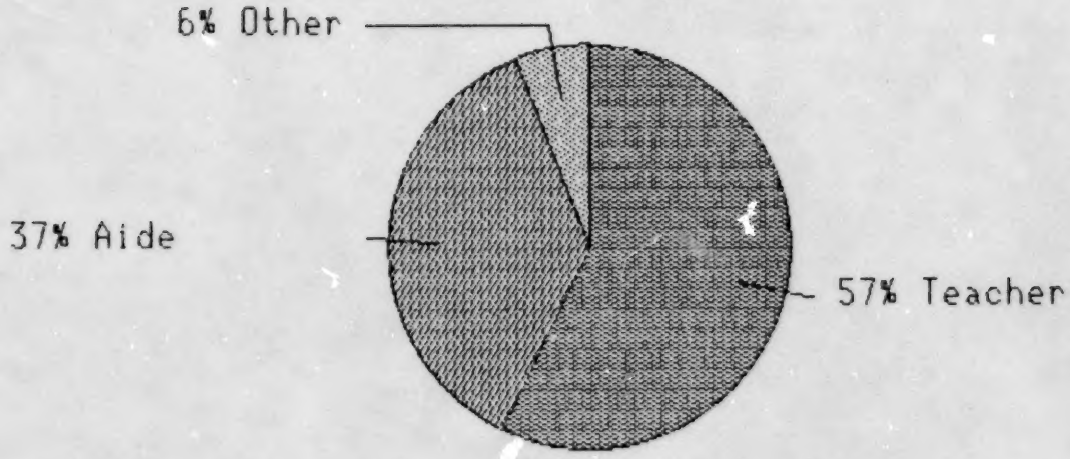



Figure 3. Student's Structured-Instruction Providers

## Summary

The following items summarize the findings of the study:

1. Approximately half of the school day was used for non-instructional activities.

2. About 20% of the school day involved structured instructional activities.

3. English was the predominant language of instruction for all the pre-kindergarten children; however, Spanish-dominant children received 31.3% of their instruction in Spanish and another 18.6% using both English and Spanish combined.

4. Small group instruction (1-6 students) was the predominant mode of instruction for all three language groups.

While the program has been relatively successful in aiding the language performance of participants, would more time for structured instructional activities and less time for non-instructional purposes lead to even greater learning?

## Bibliography

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Attachment 1: EARLY CHILDHOOD OBSERVATION FORM

The Early Childhood Observation Form was developed by ORE. It provides space to codify eleven variables on a minute-by-minute basis. It also includes a comment space where the observer can write any activities and events taking place at a certain period of time that may be of further interest. Observers were encouraged to use this space to provide a back-up system of record confirmation in case there were questions or doubts about the coding of the activity. Each side of the form provides space for recording 30 minutes of observations.

The variables of the form used by this study are:

1. **Type of Instruction:** This variable is subdivided into three categories:

- structured instruction
- unstructured instruction
- non-instruction.

Structured Instruction Time: Structured instruction time is the period of time used by an instructor to communicate and/or work on an instructional objective with a planned process. The instructional objectives are prescribed by the Bilingual Early Childhood Program (BECP) and auxiliary curriculum sources such as Barufaldi. During structured instruction, the student under observation works directly with an adult. The activities in which she or he is engaged are planned and have specific rules or expectations concerning student behavior.

Unstructured Instruction Time: During the period of time labeled unstructured instruction, the students are engaged alone or in a group in informal learning. Under this category we also include time used in activities such as experience sharing, singing songs, stories, and minutes where the child is engaged in one of the learning centers.

Non-Instructional Time: Non-instructional time is the time used by the student for the following activities: lunch, snack, nap, bathroom visits and any other idle minutes where the observed student is not engaged in instruction. Transitions from one activity to the other and free play are also considered as non- instructional.

2. **Language:** The language of instruction is the language that the instructor uses to provide the child under observation instruction regarding one or several of the skill areas or to reinforce responses provided by the child. Reinforcement responses include disciplinary statements, praise and criticism. The language coded is not limited to the language spoken by the teacher but is based on the total experience of the student under observation during that minute. It is the language heard by the student under observation regardless of whether it is spoken by the teacher, aide, the student under observation, someone else or a combination of these sources.

3. **Group Size:** Indicates the number of students who are present with the observed pupil when an activity or event is taking place.

EARLY CHILDHOOD OBSERVATION FORM--1981-82

TITLE VII

| | TIME | NO. ADULTS | ADULT CONTACT | | | | TYPE OF INSTRUCT | | | SKILLS | | | | | | CONTENT AREA | | | | | | LANG | | | | | | NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | TEACHER | AIDE | PARENT | OTHER | NO INSTR | STRUC INS | UNST INST | VISUAL | AUDITORY | MOTOR | VOCABULR | CONCEPTS | ENG SYNT | MATH | ART | PHYS ED | LITERAT | SCIENCES | SOC SCIE | OF INST | OF INTER | CURRICULUM | GROUP SIZE | LEP INTER | INSTRUCTOR | ON TASK? | |
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OBSERVER: _____

STUDENT: _____ GROUP: _____

EARLY CHILDHOOD OBSERVATION FORM--1981-82

TITLE VII

| TIME | NO. ADULTS | ADULT CONTACT | | | | TYPE OF INSTRUCT | | | SKILLS | | | | | | CONTENT AREA | | | | | | LANG | | CURRICULUM | GROUP SIZE | LEP INTER | INSTRUCTOR | ON TASK? | NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | TEACHER | AIDE | PARENT | OTHER | NO INSTR | STRUC INS | UNST INST | VISUAL | AUDITORY | MOTOR | VOCABULR | CONCEPTS | ENG SYNT | MATH | ART | PHYS ED | LITERAT | SCIENCES | SOC SCIE | OF INST | OF INTER | | | | | | |
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